

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

This Is Jesus

PART

1

TITLE

Making Room For Good News

SCRIPTURE

Mark 1:1-8



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Providence family, good morning. Hope you're doing really well. If you're a guest here with us, we're thrilled that you have joined us. If you're in one of the two or three rooms off to the side, we're just so grateful for you and pray that this time and this morning is meaningful to you as well. Thank you for making room for those who are in the room.

But it is good to see you. If you have a Bible in your hand, turn with you to Mark chapter one, Mark chapter one. It's going to be a while before we get there, but if you don't have a Bible, there's lots of Bibles. If you're in this room, in these chairs, and if you don't have one of your own, please take that home as a gift. We'd love for you to have that.

Would you pray with me? Father in heaven, we bow before you and as we begin a new series in the Gospel of Mark, Lord, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of our heart will be pleasing to you. I pray that you would root out any distortion that currently exists within our heart that we have, that we're thinking wrongly about who you are and what it means to live with you, what you have claimed. Would you help us to see a better picture, a clearer picture, the true picture in the pages of scripture?

Would you help us to have the courage to flush erroneous beliefs about Christ that perhaps were even created and constructed in the darkness of our own imagination that aren't true and yet we are living as though they are and they're having a terrible effect upon our life? Would you help us to see the true Jesus, to worship him? Would you please help us as we begin? We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

The whole Bible is about Jesus. It all points to him, every part of it points to him. When the Bible seeks to give clarity to show the parameters of his authority and his goodness, his greatness in our life, we find verses like Romans chapter 11, where it says, "From him," and he's referring to Christ, "from him and through him and to him are all things." We, if you can say it this way, are a thing. We are one of those all things. Your very life and my life, we were created by Christ. We live in Christ's world. What that means is that we were designed to find our life purpose living in a relationship with him and that his life would live through us.

But not only that, it also says that one day that each one of us will stand before the seat of judgment and we will stand before Christ himself. In Jesus, you have your origin, your purpose, and your destiny. We all came from him. He's the reason you're here, and one day you will see him face to face and so will I.

There's lots of ways that you could imagine this in a metaphor, a picture that we see in the world. Perhaps one would be the sun as the Christ is the sun around which the planets of our very lives are intended and designed to orbit. That we are supposed to have every single section of our entire life, our relationships, our sexuality, our thoughts, our doctrine. Every single thing about us is supposed to orbit around Christ, constantly keeping attention to him, responding to who he is always, recognizing that every one of these planets of our life was created by him, for him, to him. It's all about Christ.

What that means is to reject Christ or to think wrongly about Christ is to inevitably and irreparably create real distortions in our understanding about what is true and what is beautiful and what is right and what is moral and what is good and what is excellent and what is praiseworthy. In addition, to reject Christ and to think wrongly about him sends us adrift until we begin to think rightly about him.

It's been said that the most important thing about any one of us is what comes to our mind when we think about Christ. The reason that's true is because none of us, none of us, will actually rise above our vision of Jesus. Your morality will never rise above your vision of his morality. Your love, your mercy, your forgiveness, your kindness will never outpace your perspective of Christ. Yet today for so many around the world, the Christ that they imagine, sometimes the Christ they reject, sometimes the Christ they even intend and try to worship is not the real Christ, but actually is a distortion that's been constructed in the shadows of their own confusion.

This is why the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are pure gold, not only to its readers, but literally to the whole world. Because in these gospels, they reveal the true and real Jesus.

It's important to know a little bit about where we get Mark and how this is built together before we even read the first passage. For 30 years after Jesus rose from the dead and then ascended into heaven, the Gospels were not written, these four accounts. Stories about the life of Jesus were spoken verbally. They were passed verbally, house to house, generation to generation, not from word that was written to word that was read, but from mouth that spoke to ear that listened.

As such, any distortion that came, any lie that was told would be refuted by the living eyewitnesses. In other words, in those 30 years when there were so many living eyewitnesses of the things where they saw Jesus and they heard him teach, you couldn't come up and say, "You know what? I don't know if you know this, but when Jesus taught he would levitate two feet in the air," because it wasn't true. Any lie like that would be refuted by the living eyewitnesses that would say, "That's not true. I was there."

But by the middle of the first century, 30 years later after his resurrection and ascension, these eyewitnesses began to die. This is when God inspired by his Holy Spirit four men, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to record eyewitness testimony and write their gospel, these four that we call Gospels.

Today, we begin a series through the Gospel of Mark. It is going to be a long series. People will say, "How long is it?" Well, it's going to be forty-nine weeks as of right now. It's already broken out. There's going to be lots of series in between, so it's not just going to be straight through, but it's going to take us forty-nine weeks at least as of right now to be able to look at this.

What we're looking at is this idea of who is this Jesus? It's really important you understand this. Forty-nine times, we're going to take the diamond that is Jesus, so we're going to turn it just a little bit more into light and suddenly we're going to see a new facet, a new dimension of who he is, what he said. My question that I have for you today at the beginning of all of this before we look at the first eight verses is this, "If we find in scripture something that refutes or corrects a belief that you have about Jesus Christ, which one are you committed to keeping?"

If you happen to be living according to a lie, maybe that you didn't tell but someone told you about who he is, what he claimed, what he accomplished, what it means to live in a relationship with him, and the Gospel of Mark is going to unpack that and expose that, will you be willing to flush what you have built your current

understanding on in place of what we find in scripture? I hope that you will.

The Gospel of Mark was written by a guy, his name was Mark. He actually had two names. It was John Mark. I know there's a lot of Johns and there's a lot of Marks in the Bible, but John Mark is one guy, and this is different than the Gospel of John. John was his Jewish name and Mark was his Roman name, and we learn about him in the Book of Acts. There's not a ton written about him, but there is some, enough to form an idea, an understanding around him.

In Acts chapter 12, we're told that Peter is in prison and there's a church that's praying that God would do a miracle and allow Peter to be released from prison. They're meeting as a church in a woman's house named Mary, and it says that Mary was the mother of a John Mark. This guy was a young man, so he had exposure to the things of God. He heard the gospel, he heard people singing and praying as a young man. These formed ideas and categories in his own life that would come to bear throughout the rest of his life.

A chapter later, there's two guys named Paul and Barnabas, and it says that God called them and set them apart to send them on a long missionary journey to tell people about Christ who have a sin problem just like we do, who do not know that they can be forgiven of their sin. John Mark, he decided and they agreed to allow him to come to assist. During this first missionary journey, John Mark, he bailed. The word that was actually used in the Bible is he deserted them. He's a deserter. He abandoned people in their need. When things got difficult, he fled.

If you actually read through the whole Book of Acts, you cannot conclude that among all the people that you read in Acts that John Mark is the one you want to emulate. If you only had the Book of Acts, you would not name your kid John or Mark. He was the one who's marked by cowardice. He was the one who bailed on his friends doing something that was really noble because it got very hard.

Two chapters later, Paul, he's going to go on a second missionary journey. John Mark says, "You know what, man? It's sort of been some time and I think I'm ready now." Apostle Paul says, "Not a chance you're joining me because I don't trust you."

John Mark eventually makes his way to Jerusalem, and when he gets to Jerusalem, he's befriended by a man named Peter, the Apostle Peter, who was really familiar with stumbling and failing and being restored. He became the perfect mentor, a spiritual father. In fact, in First Peter chapter five, when Peter's writing his first letter, he talks and mentions Mark by name, and he calls him my son, his spiritual son. Here we find this really mature Peter pouring his life into a young John Mark who has just stumbled, who isn't trusted.

Now, I tell you this for two reasons before we start our study. One is this, some of us in the room, some of our worst days in life were because we experienced cowardice, we have deserted people. We are the ones that you look at and you go, "Boy, I wish I was not measured by my worst day." What I hope you can see is the tremendous hope that the grace of God is so much deeper than your sin, that the grace of God is so powerful that he could take one of the people that you don't want to emulate when you read the Book of Acts, and he can actually cause him, inspire him to write one of the four gospels that we're going to study for like a year.

It's amazing.

But there's another reason that I tell you this about John Mark's relationship with Peter. The early church recognized that a lot of people could be writing all kinds of things, and so how would we choose which gospel account is true and inspired by God and which one is inspired by a distortion? There was three early tests that when somebody would write, how would we know if this is supposed to fit into the New Testament of our Bible?

One of those is it had to be written by an apostle or be written by someone who was close to an apostle. The other is antiquity, which means that it had to be old. It had to be dated to the first century when the apostles were still alive. We actually have accounts in the third century. We have people who are actually writing very distorted attempts of the gospel telling us things that are not true and signing them, the Apostle John hoping to get through the gate, but because it was written in the third century, they said no.

The third was consistency. There had to be internal and external consistency, meaning the message within the letter had to be consistent with what was said at the beginning, the middle and the end. But it also had to be consistent with the other gospel accounts that were written by other apostles who were eyewitnesses of Jesus. Why do I say all that? Because Mark was not an apostle. He was not an eyewitness, but he was friends with Peter.

What we're reading in the Gospel of Mark is Peter's eyewitness testimony and nobody had a closer relationship, who experienced more tumultuous days with Jesus, seeing his grace and his mercy and his kindness and his teaching than Peter. Mark's structure in his book is really amazing. It's actually quite simple. There's the first half and the second half. In the middle, like a point of a mountain. Everything leads up to a point and then everything flows from that point and you find it halfway through in Mark chapter eight, verse twenty-nine. Jesus asked a question, "Who do you say that I am?" It is Peter who responded, "You are the Christ."

Everything before this verse leads to this confession and everything after this verse flows from this confession. Mark's goal as we read his gospel account is for us to get such a clear picture of who Jesus is, that we too confess, Jesus is the Christ.

Matthew's gospel begins with Jesus' genealogy. Luke's gospel begins with Jesus' birth narrative. John, he was a big picture guy. He just went back to creation. He just says, "Let's just talk about when Jesus made everything." Mark begins with a herald, a witness, a messenger who would urge us to make room for good news.

This is what he says starting in verse one. "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah, the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." John appeared baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the River Jordan confessing their sins."

"John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

He preached saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

A few things that I want to urge you to consider with me this morning and maybe even throughout the week. The first is that Jesus is the Promised King. He is the Promised King. The very first verse of the Gospel of Mark is actually a summary statement of the entire 16 chapters. Some people call it an incipit, which is just a term that says if you could read all 16 chapters and then you were forced, you were forced to write one sentence that could boil it all down into just one living sentence, what would you write? Mark would say, “This is what I hope you’ll write. This is my intent. This is the summary of the entire 16 chapters. It is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Now, the word gospel is a really important word. We today in churches in America and around the world, when you hear the word gospel, “Oh, he shared the gospel.” We typically think, “Oh, he shared the news that God loved us so much that he sent Christ to die for us, to be buried and to rise from the dead.” That would be true. That’s the gospel. One of the things you need to know is that anytime that the New Testament actually alludes to the word gospel, it’s never alluding to one of the four accounts that we call the Gospels with the big G, ever. It’s always referring to what gospel means, which is good news.

The word gospel, it meant something both to first century Jews and first century Romans before Jesus was here. To first century Jews, it would’ve brought their mind back to Isaiah. In Isaiah chapter 40 and in Isaiah chapter 52, we’re told there of this good news, this gospel. There, it says, “Herald of good news, say to the cities of Judah, behold the Lord God comes with might.” Then in chapter 52 it says, “How beautiful upon the mountain are the feet of him who brings good news, who brings gospel, who says to Zion, your God reigns.”

In both accounts and in every other account in the Old Testament, when the word gospel is used, it’s speaking of the good news that God is going to come to the earth and reign as a king.

Interestingly, the Romans also had an idea of what gospel was about and surprisingly they were close. Wrong person, but they had some categories right. In the first century there was the calendar, it’s right here is called the Priene calendar. We call it, I don’t know why we call it that necessarily. It’s not an actual calendar, but it was about the birth of Caesar Augustus. I want to pull out some of the words translated in English for you so that you can see what’s happening here. Don’t forget as we read this, Mark 1:1.

It says on this thing, “Providence,” and he’s not talking about our church, okay? He’s talking about the providence of God. “Providence has ordained the most perfect completion for human life by giving Augustus. A savior for us. The birthday of the God Augustus is, notice this, the beginning for the world of the gospel that has come to men through him.” The name Jesus means Savior. Mark chapter one, it talks about the beginning of the gospel for the whole world is that Jesus is the Promised King, who is the Savior. All of these things are wrapped up.

Now you have to understand what’s happening here. To worship in Rome someone other than Caesar was

treasonous. Here we have the coward of Acts 13, 14 and 15, and he is standing up in courage and writing a birth announcement of a true and better king, such courage. Just a few years later, this baby Augustus, as he grew, they began to mint coins in his honor. On that coin, on one side it was his face and it said Caesar Augustus. The other it says, Divus Filius, Caesar Augustus, Son of God.

Mark's announcement, do you see it? You see it coming together of the arrival of King Jesus was incredibly dangerous for him to write because he's saying, "We have a better king. The true Lord, the true God, the promised one. His name is Jesus, which means savior. His title, it's not his last name, his title is the Christ. The Christ means the promised one or the anointed king, and he is the Son of God."

In verse three, we also learn that he is the Lord. He says, "Prepare the way for the Lord." The word Lord was used in the Old Testament as a substitute name for Yahweh because the Jewish people refused to say or write the name Yahweh because they believed it was too holy. What Mark is saying, a Jewish man who has been so overwhelmed that Jesus is the friend of sinners, that Jesus drew him into a relationship to even be able to know him and to love him and to say his name. Mark is saying here, "Jesus is Yahweh, the creator of the universe, the sustainer of all things, the covenant maker and the covenant keeper, the one who sent all the prophets. This Jesus is God who became a man who came to reign."

Some of you I know you listen to that and you think, "Brian, I'll give you the whole good teacher and moral specimen, but I just have too many cultural and personal barriers set up to believe that God Almighty could become a man, a baby." I want you to know that Mark's readers had far more barriers than you. These are people who have been taught their entire life that ultimate reality was untouchable. All of a sudden he's saying that Jesus, the ultimate reality has a body that can be touched. These people could not say his name, much less imagine God Almighty taking a body that needed a bath.

What Mark is saying is this. He's saying, "I'm going to show you how Jesus broke down our faith barriers," and if you will follow me along this journey, he will break down yours.

The second thing I want you to see here is that Jesus prepares his people with a witness. He always has. He did it then. He still does it today. There are people who are going to begin a relationship with God Almighty through Jesus Christ this year, and the reason is because he's going to send you to be a herald and a witness to tell them about him. A witness. He prepares his people with a witness. You see, no king showed up at a town or village and said, "By the way, I'm the new king. I'm here. You should know it's me." There was always a herald. There was always someone who went beforehand him. Mark knows. He's writing to Romans. He's writing to Roman Christians and non-Christians. He knows that they need a herald, and so he looks back and he goes, and God gave Jesus a herald. His name was John the Baptist.

He pulls from two different places, from Isaiah 40 and Malachi three. You see this here, but notice it starts, "As it is written in Isaiah, the prophet." I just want to explain this. Why did he know? He's pulling one verse, this first verse, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way." You can just look up Malachi chapter three, verse one, and you're going to find it there.

In Isaiah chapter 40, there it says, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” Many times writers and even people within the Bible, including Jesus himself, will take a whole category like multiple prophets. Because Isaiah was a major prophet, he had sixty-six chapters. He was a major player, major figure, and Malachi is really great, cool guy. He’s in heaven. He’s doing fantastic, but he wrote four. It’s like big and small, and so here he simply groups them together and he gives credit to the larger.

Jesus did the exact same thing one time. After he rose from the dead, he’s walking down a road with some friends and they don’t recognize who he is. Once he shows himself, it says, “Then he began to show them in the law, the prophets and the Psalms, everything that was written about him.” The Old Testament is not the law, the prophets and the Psalms. It’s the law, the prophets and the writings. There was five books that made up the section called the writings, but the biggest longest one is the Book of Psalms.

Even Jesus practiced this in his day where he simply took the whole and he says, “What’s the biggest one? You’re going to know what I’m talking about when I give you the biggest one,” and this is what he does. He goes, Isaiah. Then both of these prophets, he talks about the herald that’s going to come.

You see in ancient times an envoy would come before the king to prepare a way. When it says to prepare a way, we think, oh, he’s got to... what’s a way? A way is a road. We have roads everywhere. This is a time and a place, there’s no roads. If a king has to get to your village and there’s a creek, you need a bridge, you need a road. An envoy would go to prepare a way for the king to get to those people, and then he would prepare those people so that when the king arrived, they wouldn’t be busy doing other things. They’d be ready for him to receive him.

John says, “Jesus had a herald, an envoy, his name was John.” Verse four and five. “John appeared baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” It says, “The whole country of Judea and all Jerusalem, they all went out there and were baptized,” and it says that they were there confessing their sins.

John the Baptist preached repentance. This is so important. He recognized that every single one of us has a sin problem and we are about to be met. We are about to be face to face with Jesus, the Son of God who has no sin problem. He’s the perfect one. He’s the holy one. John, to prepare everyone says, “You all need to repent.” We read some of his sermon in Luke chapter three, verse eight. There he says these words. He says, “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance and do not begin to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father.”

In other words, there was Jewish people from all of Jerusalem and all Judea coming out to this place and some of them were saying, “I think I’m probably already ready for him. Let’s just see him. I’m a part of the holy lineage. Abraham is my forefather. I’m in the right club. I’m in the right family, the right ethnicity. I’m ready.”

John says, “No, you’re not. That if you have a sin problem in your heart, you are not ready to see this king. For he is perfect in all of his ways.” As a result of that, there must be a life that’s committed of repentance that every time we see something that’s true about his holiness and we see the reflection not working out in our own life, is that we’re supposed to not flush the Bible. We’re supposed to repent of our sin.

To show their repentance, they would go into the water where John was and they would be baptized, and we’ll see baptism next week and we’ll read and learn a lot about baptism because next week we’re going to look at how Jesus was even baptized, but baptism does not and did not wash away sin. It only acknowledged these people’s need of forgiveness of sin.

Now, this is very important. Up until this point in time, everybody in the Old Testament, the Jews, there was self-washings. God prescribed a way to come to worship. You need to prepare, so you need to wash your hands, your feet, your beard, your ears, your face. You need to wash. Self-preparation, self-cleansing to worship the Lord.

This is the first time in the Bible where it actually said that you can’t prepare yourself for this. I have to do something for you. You have to be baptized. “I baptize you,” John says, “to help you to be able to see that nobody receives fitness to be with this King Jesus through their own hand.”

Some of you have come today and you’ve made a resolution to turn over a new leaf. I’m going to try religion instead of being so irreligious, and I want you to know that that religion and that irreligion, they’re both the same dead end. You cannot and I cannot, we cannot self-cleanse for this king. The rest of the gospel is how this King Jesus is going to go do something that we couldn’t do. He lived without sin. We couldn’t do it. He died for our sin because we couldn’t do it. He rose from the dead because we couldn’t do it.

But when we put our trust in him, all that he’s accomplished is accrued within our account and all of our sin is put upon him. It’s the gospel and he prepares his people to hear it through witnesses.

Third thing I want you to see is that Jesus meets his people in the wilderness. I want you to notice that there’s a place, mentions it two times here. There’s a place where John did all this baptizing and proclaiming, and it’s the wilderness. He says in verse three and four, two different times he says, “One’s crying in the wilderness.” In verse four it says, “He was baptizing in the wilderness.”

You notice that inside the word wilderness is the word wild, and that’s how John is pretty much described in verse six. He’s wearing camel hair and leather belt and he’s eating like bugs and locusts and wild honey and sort of an interesting guy. I am absolutely fascinated by him. I have no doubt he would be popular today for probably all the wrong reasons. But what’s so interesting is this, and this is an allusion to something that is absolutely significant.

The people of Israel, they would go and meet John where substance and durability mattered more than taste and fashion. There are so many people who when they hear the claims of Christ and they say, “I think I’m going to follow Jesus,” they’re struck by the fact that if I follow all the things that he asks me to do, I’m going

to be seen as weird. Jesus was seen as really weird.

Did you know today that in hell, nobody who is in hell is wishing that they were more fashionable when they were on the earth? What they want there is a durable savior, but they don't have one there. What they need is substance. You see, when you're in this kind of a place, when you're at the judgment seat of Christ, you're not going to care what you drove. You're not going to care what you ate. What you care at that moment is that what is there is there is substance to my account and there is durability to the strength of my savior.

He was wild and he went out to the wilderness, which was fitting. To us, when we think of the word wilderness, we think of a forest, but a forest is not a wilderness. A forest is teeming with life. You can plant in the forest. There's trees, there's things that grow. You can hunt. There's fish. There's all kinds of life in the forest. In the Bible, the word wilderness is always a place of desert, a place that will not sustain life. A place where there is no water, there's no light, there's no heat, there is no food. It will not sustain life or community of life.

Why the wilderness? Because God, historically, throughout all the pages of scripture met people in the wilderness. That's where he met Moses in the wilderness. That's where he gave 10 commandments in the wilderness. That's where he brought the people into the wilderness to show them that he is the only savior.

Some of you are like, well, this stinks. We live in Raleigh. We don't live in the wilderness. We don't live in the desert. I guess I'll never know the Lord. That's not the truth. But the wilderness is actually the place at the end of our rope where all of our functional saviors have failed. Only in the wilderness when he's all you have left, do you see that Jesus is not an accessory to life, but he is the manna that falls. He is the water that comes from the rock. He is the light and the heat and the fire by night, and he is the cloud that gives direction by day.

Some of us have had a hard week. I had a few hard days this week, just facing disappointment. It's so interesting. I just kept running to the word, and what I found here is this is when my other functional saviors proved insufficient, he met me in the wilderness. He does that to people. He'll do that to you.

The last thing I want you to see before we take the Lord's Supper is that Jesus transforms his people by his Spirit. By His Spirit. John knew that Jesus was unlike anyone else who's ever walked the face of the earth and ever will. In fact, in verse seven, he says, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to stoop down and untie." Jesus called John the Baptist, the greatest man that was born of a woman. John says, "The best of men are not worthy to untie his shoe."

Multiple times, we've talked now about this preparing a way for the king. I hope you understand that in this day and age, they didn't have John Deere back then. To prepare a way was oppressive work. What's amazing about the rest of the Bible, including the Gospel of Mark, is that Jesus decided to actually make a way for us by doing the oppressive work. Not we for him, but he for us.

Many times we're going to see this word that's translated way, prepare the way. It's the word hodos. It's going to be translated accurately as the word road, as in what Jesus walked to Jerusalem when he went to the cross and felt that oppression for us. Mark 10 says, "They were on the road going up to Jerusalem." You see, kings



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